

Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

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S E C R E T GUATEMALA 4244

NODIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: GT, BH UK PBOR
SUBJ: GUATEMALA-BELIZE EISPUTE

REF: STATE 157294

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT ON LEARNING OF BRITISH MOVEMENT OF TROOPS INTO BELIZE BY VC-10'S , FEELS HE HAS NO CHOIC BUT TO RINFORCE HIS FORCES IN PETEN WITH TWO ADDITIONAL INFANTRY BATTALIONS. IN LIGHT OF OUR CONVERSATION, DURING WHICH I GAVE HIM MESSAGE CONTAINED IN STATE 157294, HE WILL FOR THE MOMENT ISSUE ONLY ANTICIPATTORY ALERT FOR THE LIFTING OF THESE TWO BATTALIONS AND DELAY EXECUTION ORDER WUNTIL HE HAS HEARD FURTHER FROM US. HE HAS REITERATED TO ME THAT HE WILL NOT ATTACK BELIZE UNLESS BRITISH PROCEED WITH UNILATERAL GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED ON ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER OBIOLS AT 9:30 AM TODAY JULY 7 TO CONVEY ORAL MESSAGE CONTAINED IN REFTEL. I HAD ONLY BEGUN WHEN WE WERE INTERRUPTED BY TELPHONE CALL FROM PRESIDENT LAUGERUD TO OBIOLS TO DISCUSS REUTER REPORT THAT TWENTY BRITISH VC-10'S HAD BEGUN TO TRANSIT BERMUDA WITH TROOPS OFR BELIZE. ON LEARNING THA I WAS PRESENT WITH OBIOLS, PRESIDENT ASKED TO SPEAK TO ME AND DISUCSSED THIS RPORT WITH ME . HE REMINDED ME THAT, IN
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RESPONSE TO OUR REQUEST, HIS GOVERMENT HAD BEEN ACTING WITH GREAT RESTRAINT, NOTING THAT AMONG OTHER THINGS HE HAD ORDERED THAT HIS FORCES NEAR BELIZE BORDER SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AT DISTANCE OF TEN KILOMETERS FROM THE BORDER TO PREVENT ANY POSSIBILITY OF ACCIDENT. NEVERTHELESS, DESPITE ASSURANCES WE HAD GIVEN THEM ABOUT BRITISH, BRITISH WERE PROCEEDING IN HIGHLY PROVOCATIVE MANNER. HE SAID HE EXTIMATED THAT EACH

VC-10 COULD CARRY 150 MEN AND THAT HE THEREFORE
EXTIMATED THAT AS MANY AS 3,000 NEW TROOPS COULD BE ON
THEIR WAY TO BELIZE. HE SAID HE HAD NO CHOICE IN THIS
SITUATION BUT TO RIENFORCE HIS MEN IN THE PETEN. HE
SAID AT THE PRESENT TIME HE HAD ONLY ONE REINFORCED
INFANTRY BATTALION IN THE PETEN, COMPRISING A FORCE OF SOME
900 MEN. HE HAD NO CHOIC, THEREFORE, BUT TO MOVE IN
TWO ADDITIONAL INFANTRY BATTALIONS. IT HAD BEEN THEIR
EXPECTATION THAT AT THIS TIME THEY WOULD BE AT THE NEGOTIATING
TABLE DEALING WITH DECENT PEOPLE, BUT INSTEAD THE BRITISH
HAD MOVED A FRIGATE ON TUESDAY AND NOW WERE BRINGING IN
ADDITIONAL FORCES. HE GREGRETTEED THIS ACTION BUT FELT THERE WAS
NOTHING ELSE HE COULD DO.

3. I EXPLAINED TO THE PRESIDENT THAT I WAS IN THE
PROCESS OF CONVEYING MESSAGE TO THE ACTING FOREIGN
MINISTER AND I THOUGHT IT IMPORTANT, IN VIEW OF WHAT HE HAD
TOLD ME, TO READ THIS MESSAGE DIRECTLY TO HIM. I SAID I
THOUGHT THIS MESSAGESCONTAINED SOME REASSURING ELEMENTS
WHICH I HOPED WOULD AFFECT HIS DECISION. I THEN READ HIM THE
ORAL MESSAGE IN FULL.

4. THE PRESIDENT SAID HE APPRECIATED HAVING THIS INFORMATION.
HE SAID HE WOULD GIVE ME HIS WORD OF HONOR
THAT AS LONGIAS THERE WAS NO UNILATERAL DECLARATION OF
INDEPENDENCE, HE WOULD NOT ATTACK BELIZE. HE SAID HE HAD BEEN
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VERY CLEAR WITH ROWLANDS LAST YEAR ON THIS POINT.
BUT HE SIAD WE WOULD HAVE TO UNDERSTAND HIS CURRENT SITUATION
IN VIEW OF THE NEW BRITISH ACTIONS AND THAT AS SOON AS HIS
ARMY LEADERS LEARNED OF THE MOVEMENT OF TROOPS, THEY WOULD
BE JUMPING ON HIM. HE ASKED ME WHAT I THOUGHT HE COULD DO,
EXCEPT TO MOVE THESE FORCES IN THE LIGHT OF THE BRITISH
ACTIONS WHICH HE FOUND INSULTING.

5. I SAID I COULD ONLY EXPRESS TO HIM, AS SECRETARY VANCE
HAD EXPRESSED TO MOLINA YESTERDAY, THE HOPE THAT HE WOULD
CONTINUE TO EXERCISE RESTRAINT IN SPITE OF THE BRITISH MOVES
AND THAT I HOPED HE WOULD CONSIDER THE REASSURING ELEMENTS
IN THE MESSAGE I HAD JUST GIVEN HIM. I SAID I WOULD, OF
COURSE, REPORT TO THE SECRETARY IMMEDIATELY WHAT HE HAD
TOLD ME. AFTER A MOMENT'S REFLECTION, THE PRESIDENT SAID
THAT HE WOULD ONLYISSUE ANTICIPATORY ALERT AT THIS MOMENT AND
THAT HE WOULD DELAY THE FINAL EXECUTING ORDER FOR THE
TROOP MOVEMENT UNTI HE HAD A CHANCE TO HEAR BACK FROM
ME. I TOLD THEPRESIDENT THAT, IF I HAD UNDERSTOOD HIM
CORRECTLY, THAT IF HE WERE TO EVENTUALLY DECIDE THAT HE
MUST MOVE HIS TROOPS, THEY WOULD BE MOVED ONLY TO
REINFORCE THE EXISTING GARRISION IN THE PETEN AND WOULD NOT

BE USED MILITARILY AGAINST BELIZE. HE SAID MY UNDERSTANDING WAS CORRECT AND REPEATED THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF ATTACKING EXCEPT IN THE EVENT OF A UNILATERAL GRANT OF INDEPENDENCE.

6. PRESIDENT

SAID THAT HE FULLY TRUSTED US AND SECRETARY VANCE, AND KNEW HE COULD TRUST THE MESSAGE I HAD CONVEYED TO HIM, BUT HE DID NOT TRUST THE BRITISH. HE SAID HE DID NOT WANT ARMED CONFLICT BUT COULD NOT BE INSULTED.

7 HE CONCLUDED BY ASKING ME TO EXPRESS TO THE SECRETARY HIS APPRECIATION FOR EVERYTHING WE WERE DOING TO ASSIST THE SITUATION AND TO TRY TO PREVENT AN ANGOLA IN LATIN AMERICA.

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8. COMMENT: I AM NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT BRITISH CAN BE PERSUADED TO ALTER VERY PROMPTLY THEIR REINFORCEMENT MEASURES. NEVERTHELESS, THE PRESIDENT'S DELAY IN EFFECTING HIS OWN COUNTERACTION NOW GIVES BOTH SIDES A LITTLE TIME FOR REFLECTION AND THEREFORE IS WORTH HAVING. IN ALL LOGIC, THE PRESIDENT'S CATEGORIC ASSURANCE THAT HE WILL NOT ATTACK BELIZE EXCEPT IN THE EVENT OF UNILATERAL INDEPENDENCE SHOULD BE ENOUGH TO INDUCE THE BRITISH TO CONSIDER SOME DE-ESCALATION I WOULD APPRECIATE HAVING DEPARTMENT'S INSTRUCTIONS SOONEST.

9. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH CONSIDER REPEATING THIS CABLE TO LONDON AND BELIZE.
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Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009